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We Mortals

A Play in
Three Acts by

M. SALMONSEN

Author of
"From the Marriage
License Window"

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AUTHOR OF "FROM THE MARRIAGE LICENSE WINDOW"

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The Cast

KNOX, - - a Retired Merchant

CLARA, - - His Daughter

MARIE, - - His Housekeeper

RAY, - - - - an Artist

PRATT, - - a Business Man

GEORGE, - - - His Son

Mrs. HILL, - - - a Widow

LOVEJOY, - a Justice of the Peace

FIRST ACT.

Sitting room in Knox's house. The furniture is rich and elegant. A large armchair on each side of the center table. An easel with a picture of Mr. Knox is placed to the right. Knox, a man about fifty, and Mrs. Hill, a widow of about thirty-five, enter through the middle door. He is dressed in a dark suit, and she in a dress of dark colors.

MR. KNOX.

No, my dear madam, I cannot allow you to leave us so soon. You have only been here two weeks. You certainly must prolong your visit—I insist upon it.

MRS. HILL

I shall have to leave, Mr. Knox; you know I intend to move, and there are so many details to be looked after.

MR. KNOX.

If I had known, I should not have hurried so in winding up the estate of your deceased husband.

MRS. HILL.

Yes, you would. I am exceedingly thankful to you for your great help. I really do not know what I should have done without you. I shall never be able to repay you.

MR. KNOX.

Oh, don't mention it. I would like you to stay a few days longer that you may witness a little celebration in our family.

MRS. HILL

(hurriedly).

Is it your birthday?

MR. KNOX

(looking around to see that no one is near).

No. A young man will arrive here to-day with his father. I expect them any moment. He comes to ask for Clara's hand.

MRS. HILL

(manifesting great surprise).

You don't say, Mr. Knox. I am surprised, of course agreeably. I fancied Clara's thoughts were somewhere else.

MR. KNOX.

Somewhere else?

MRS. HILL

(somewhat embarrassed).

Oh, I simply mean, I did not think she was contemplating marriage. Is it a settled affair?

MR. KNOX.

Not positively, but as good as settled. You see Clara made his acquaintance during a summer vacation two years ago, at his father's house.

MRS. HILL.

She has not seen him since?

MR. KNOX.

No, but they have been corresponding all the time.

MRS. HILL.

And you are intimately acquainted with the family?

MR. KNOX.

Of course I am. Do you think I would allow my daughter to cultivate the friendship of a young man whose family I was not thoroughly acquainted with? The young man is just my choice.

MRS. HILL.

Your choice? Are you sure that she has chosen him too?

MR. KNOX.

I never asked her; but I pride myself on being a pretty good judge of a woman's heart. Besides, Clara will always do what her father thinks is right for her to do. There always was strict discipline in our family.

MRS. HILL.

So you don't believe in a woman's free will?

MR. KNOX.

It is all nonsense, this modern free will. A father knows what is for the good of his daughter better than she does.

MRS. HILL.

It sounds like a Chinese doctrine.

MR. KNOX.

Why, they have just the selfsame idea in France. I thought you were aware of that. Now, mind you, I do not compel my daughter against her own free will.

MRS HILL.

But you try to influence her, using your paternal authority. Is it not so?

MR. KNOX.

Certainly. I will make use of all my influence to link her fate to the person whom I consider will make her happy.

MRS. HILL.

And that person will arrive to-day, you say?

MR. KNOX.

I expect him and his father here any time this afternoon, and as soon as the matter is settled to the satisfaction of all, we are going to celebrate. Now, Mrs. Hill, I want your presence on that occasion, and I hope you will change your program.

MRS. HILL.

You are very kind and considerate, Mr. Knox, but I don't know that I can. I have made arrangements with Ray, the artist, to accompany me.

MR. KNOX

(greatly surprised).

With Ray, the artist! who is just about finishing my portrait?

MRS. HILL.

Yes, Mr. Knox, I have fallen so much in love—

MR. KNOX

(interrupting).

Fallen in love! —

MRS. HILL.

Fallen in love with the picture, which I think is so superbly painted that I have invited him to my house that he may try his art on my modest features.

MR. KNOX.

Why not stay here and have your portrait painted?

MRS. HILL.

As I told you before I have some business of importance to transact. Besides, I think a portrait is always most successful when painted in our daily surroundings.

RAY

(a young man about twenty-five, dressed in a fashionable suit of modest gray color, appearing in the door).

Do I intrude?

MR. KNOX.

Not at all; we were just talking about you.

RAY.

How complimentary.

MRS. HILL.

Yes, it was complimentary. We admired your art and skill.

RAY

(bowing to Mrs. Hill).

When the subject is so charming from an artistic point of view as you the work is relatively easy.

MR. KNOX

(bowing).

How flattering?

MRS. HILL.

And how charming from an artistic point of view.

MR. KNOX.

But Ray, my portrait is not quite finished, is it?

RAY.

It lacks only a finishing touch, that is all.

MRS. HILL.

You just came for the purpose of giving it the finishing touch?

RAY.

I am not in a hurry.

MRS. HILL.

I think I shall leave the artist and his subject undisturbed for a little while.

MR. KNOX.

Oh. no, don't leave us.

RAY.

Your presence may inspire the artist.

MRS. HILL.

And perhaps be instrumental in disturbing the likeness.

MR. KNOX.

No, no, your presence is always productive of harmony.

MRS. HILL.

You seem, both of you, to be at home in the art of gallantry. (in the doorway with a nod to Ray.) I must nevertheless leave you—much to your sorrow.

MR. KNOX.

Is not she a charming woman?

RAY.

Indeed she is, I shall be glad to fasten her features to the canvas.

MR. KNOX.

I am sorry she is going to leave us.

RAY.

I understand she is going to return very soon.

MR. KNOX.

Did she tell you so?

RAY.

She asked me to finish her portrait in the shortest possible time.

MR. KNOX

(inquisitively).

What in the deuce has prompted her to have her portrait painted. She is not rich, do you know?

RAY.

No, indeed, I don't know, nor do I care. I understand she has a dear friend to whom she is going to present it.

MR. KNOX.

Say, Ray, let me have a confidential talk with you. First, let me tell you that I am a sort of a guardian for her.

RAY.

You are?

MR. KNOX.

Yes; that is, I am her adviser, and I wish to keep the little her husband left her together. She is not exactly a spendthrift, but you know women will—

RAY.

Yes, I know they will often spend money lavishly, particularly when they are in love with a man.

MR. KNOX.

I did not say she was in love.

RAY.

But you kind of suspect it.

MR. KNOX.

Well, I do not know what to think. I will be frank with you. It seems to me that you have paid her so much attention during her stay in my house, and that she, on the other side, has reciprocated with so much politeness—

RAY.

I have treated her as I have treated hundreds of beautiful women.

MR. KNOX.

Hundreds of them!

RAY.

Yes! with politeness and respect.

MR. KNOX.

And you treat all beautiful women alike?

RAY.

With the exception of one.

MR. KNOX

(putting his hands on Ray's shoulders and looking in his eyes).

And how do you treat that one exception?

RAY.

As a man will treat the woman of his choice.

MR. KNOX

(with a joyful voice).

Oh, I see, you are engaged, if not married?

RAY.

Only engaged.

MR. KNOX.

And— who is—

RAY.

Don't ask any leading question. Our engagement is a secret.

MR. KNOX.

Well, well, I declare—of course she is young, beautiful and rich.

RAY.

I don't know how rich she is.

MR. KNOX.

Her parents, as a matter of course, are aware of your engagement.

RAY.

Her mother is dead, her father is ignorant of our relation.

MR. KNOX.

But don't you think he ought to know?

RAY.

We will tell him in due time.

MR. KNOX.

Excuse me, Ray, for meddling in your affairs; but it seems to me that that time is due long ago. Of course, I will admit there may be exceptions. But it is none of my business; so we will drop the subject.

RAY
(with a knowing wink).

Yes, and talk about Mrs. Hill?

MR. KNOX.

Not necessarily, but if you wish to, all right. I feel greatly delighted in her company and would like her to stay a few days more.

RAY.

If the question is not a leading one, may I ask you for what object?

MR. KNOX.

I would like her to be present at a little formal festival — the engagement of my daughter.

RAY

(embarrassed).

Which one?

MR. KNOX.

Which one? I have only one, Ray, you ought to know.

RAY.

Certainly, I was a little absent-minded. To whom?

MR. KNOX.

I would rather not give any names until the engagement is an accomplished fact.

RAY

(nervously, looking at his watch).

Excuse me, Mr. Knox, but I will have to leave you.

MR. KNOX.

Before you go, let me ask you a favor. Try to persuade Mrs. Hill to prolong her visit a few days. You need not tell her you are engaged.

RAY.

I was thinking of telling her before she and I start for her home.

MR. KNOX

(jokingly).

Then you had better tell her that you are married.

RAY.

Why?

MR. KNOX.

She may be nursing some false illusions.

RAY

(laughing).

Oh, no, there is no danger, I certainly have never given her any reasons.

MR. KNOX.

I don't doubt it my young friend, but you see a woman is after all but a woman.

RAY.

That is good logic. But she is in my opinion more sensible than the majority of her sex.

MR. KNOX.

You are right; I think so myself. I would not have spoken to you as I have, if I were not her guardian.

RAY.

I thank you for your confidence, and you can be sure I shall never betray it.

MR. KNOX.

Well, Ray, if I can help you in any way with your own affairs, don't forget to let me know; I may perhaps be able to assist you to bring about a reconciliation.

RAY.

You mean when my father-in-law turns me and my intended out of the house?

MR. KNOX.

Oh, there is no danger, I hope, fathers always forgive their daughters.

RAY

(taking his hand).

I thank you. I will stay here a few days longer, and I hope to persuade Mrs. Hill to do the same.

(In leaving through the middle door, CLARA enters from the door to the right. She walks toward her father, who presses a kiss on her forehead. She is a blonde of a very attractive appearance, about twenty years old. Her dress is fashionable, of light colors matched with good taste).

MR. KNOX.

Darling, I was just going to send for you.

CLARA.

I have prepared everything for the reception of our guests. Each may have his own room,—now Mrs. Hill is going home.

MR. KNOX.

I hardly think she is going for a day or two.

CLARA.

She just told me that she could not possibly stay any longer.

Mr Knox.

I have asked her to remain and be present at our little festival.

Clara.

Oh, father, I wish you would not mention that matter again.

Mr. Knox.

Dear child, what are you saying! Have you not, from the very moment you saw George, declared him to be a most admirable fellow?

Clara.

Yes, papa, I take him to be an unusually good-natured, industrious and well meaning man.

Mr. Knox.

What more do you want?

Clara.

I don't think I love him.

MR. KNOX

(warmly).

You don't think you love him! The real love always comes after marriage. I did not—

CLARA.

Did you not love mother before you married her?

MR. KNOX.

Certainly, certainly, my child, but not so much as after we had been married.

CLARA.

But I don't love George at all, I only like him.

MR. KNOX.

Not at all! Did you not always think that the woman he married would be happy?

CLARA.

I am still of that opinion.

MR. KNOX.

Well, why not be that woman?

CLARA

(deprecatingly).

You don't want me to fall in love with all the men I like?

MR. KNOX.

Gracious, Clara, what do I hear? Have you a liking for many men?

CLARA.

You know better, papa.

MR. KNOX.

I don't know anything. I am afraid you have absorbed some of these modern ideas from the young artist, Ray. But let me tell you, that fellow is as good as married already.

CLARA.

Excuse me, father, from hearing any more of engagements and marriages.

MR. KNOX.

I am sorry, very sorry, to hear you speak in this way, and I am sorry for George, who is coming here to day, full of hope and expectation of future happiness. I cannot compel you, of course not, but I want you to think the matter over. I am getting old, and I wish to see you well taken care of and happy before I close my eyes. If American girls would heed their parents a little more than they do, we would not have so much misery in married life.

CLARA.

I know you mean well and have my welfare in view, but in this matter I ought to be left alone, and benefit or suffer by my own selection. We American girls may perhaps be a little too romantic, but it is a thousand times better to live, if it is only one year, with a man whom you love, than to drag a whole life through with a man whom you can only honor for his honest intentions and good qualities.

MR. KNOX.

To reason with you seems futile. But I feel George's presence will make you think otherwise.

(The conversation is abruptly stopped by the entrance of PRATT. He is a man in the fifties, of light complexion, with thin hair, and a full beard. He carries a valise in each hand, and a cigar, not lighted, in his mouth. He stops a moment in the doorway while Knox and Clara walk toward him, Knox with open arms).

PRATT.

Am I in the right place?

MR. KNOX.

Of course you are, my dear Pratt; welcome to our house.

PRATT.

I had a hard time in finding you.

MR. KNOX.

I wrote you my address,—but where is George?

PRATT.

I expect he will soon be here. He must have missed my train.

CLARA

(helping Pratt to carry his things to a corner of the room).

We did not expect you so soon Mr. Pratt. Father intended to meet you at the depot. You surprised us.

PRATT

(looking closely at Clara).

Why, you have grown to be a beautiful little lady, since I saw you a few years ago. (To Knox) And you look well, too. You have grown quite stout.

MR. KNOX.

That is a sure indication that I am growing older. Sit down, my friend, and make yourself at home. (To Clara) Tell Marie to prepare a little lunch.

CLARA

(bowing).

I will.

MR. KNOX

(taking a seat opposite Pratt).

Now, tell me how you are getting along?

PRATT.

After a fashion, Knox. I have enough of worldly goods, but since my wife's death I have felt very lonesome at times.

MR. KNOX.

That is just what is the matter with me, too.

PRATT.

When a man has been married once, it is hard for him to live the life of a bachelor.

MR. KNOX.

You are of the opinion he should marry again.

PRATT.

That is the only thing, Knox, the only thing.

MR. KNOX.

That is if his first wife is dead.

PRATT.

Or his second wife, or his last wife for that matter. Of course, I have my son.

MR. KNOX.

Yes, and I have my daughter. Fortunately, I have found a most excellent housekeeper.

PRATT.

And I am just looking for one. But there is in fact no other consolation for a widower than to remarry.

MR. KNOX.

I am inclined to believe you are right, in fact I know you are.

PRATT.

The only consolation I got from our minister, when my wife died, was that she was better off.

MR. KNOX.

It is funny, I had the same experience; that's the kind of a consolation that almost amounts to an insult.

PRATT.

Is it not?

MR. KNOX.

And if a man marries again, people will wonder if he really loved his deceased wife.

PRATT.

Yes, but we don't care for what people say or think. I loved my wife better at the close of her life than I did when we first married.

MR. KNOX.

I remember she was not exactly your choice.

PRATT.

No, I had chosen for myself, but, in obedience to my parents, I gave her up.

MR. KNOX.

And what became of your first choice.

PRATT.

I understood she married and became very happy.

MR. KNOX.

I am glad to hear.

PRATT.

I hope so, at least. I have not heard of her for several years. And as to you, Knox, are you thinking of finding for yourself a better half?

MR. KNOX.

No, I will wait and see my daughter in harbor before I take any decided step.

PRATT.

She will soon be in harbor. George will take care of her.

MR. KNOX.

Is he still the same good fellow he used to be?

PRATT.

He is just as good as ever; a most remarkable boy. He is not like other young men of his age. He is always consulting me, even in the most trivial matters. Sometimes I think he is overdoing his confidence. A young man should have some secrets of his own.

MR. KNOX.

You are right. I shall be glad to see him again, and I hope he will fully win Clara's heart.

PRATT.

He is simply irresistible, Knox.

(MARIE, an elderly lady, enters with a bottle of wine and glasses on a tray. She is not noticed by Pratt, who is scanning a paper he has picked up. Knox pours wine into the glasses, and she is approaching Pratt).

MR. KNOX.

My friend, welcome to my humble abode. Let us drink to the success of our families and the realization of our plans.

(In taking a glass Pratt discovers the presence of Marie. He looks perplexed, and drops the glass on the floor. She has hurriedly placed the tray on the table, and takes a step backwards when she recognizes him. Pratt seems at loss to understand the situation, but after a few moments silence he regains his presence of mind).

Something has taken you very much by surprise. Is this not an unexpected meeting of two friends who have been parted many years?

PRATT

(somewhat recovered).

It is indeed.

MR. KNOX

(to Marie).

And you, Marie, you seem to have lost the power of speech from this great surprise.

MARIE.

I can hardly believe my own eyes.

MR. KNOX

(to Pratt).

Would you like to enjoy this unexpected event without the presence of a third person?

PRATT.

If you don't object.

MR. KNOX

(to Marie).

A sudden surprise, I know, always affects the nerves of a woman, and makes her unable to attend to her work for a while. You will please entertain my friend, I shall withdraw to my library, and be ready to meet you both when lunch is ready.

PRATT

(after Knox has left).

I can hardly collect my thoughts. Is it really you, Marie, my friend of former days?

MARIE.

As sure as your name is George Pratt.

PRATT.

It is twenty years since I saw you.

MARIE.

Yes, twenty long years have elapsed since you deceived me.

PRATT

(meekly).

I was a young man then, Marie.

MARIE.

But old enough to know that you wronged me.

PRATT.

I obeyed the will of my parents.

MARIE.

And sacrificed the happiness of a woman whose heart you besieged with your protestations of faithfulness, and who was too willing to listen to your passionate but false assurances of eternal love.

PRATT.

You judge me too harshly—

MARIE.

And you forsook me to marry the woman of your parents' choice. You lived happily —I suppose?

PRATT.

You are mistaken. Our life was not really happy, at least not at the beginning. She was, however, a good faithful woman.

MARIE.

Too good for you—

PRATT.

Perhaps you are right. As the years rolled by our friendship grew stronger, and when she died a few years ago, I felt the loss as keenly as any man under the circumstances.

MARIE.

As any man feels the loss of a faithful dog.

PRATT.

You are too bitter, and you don't seem able to forget and forgive.

MARIE.

I have been hardened in the school of life.

PRATT.

I understand you married some time after we separated?

MARIE.

After OUR child had died and after having lived with my mother for two years in abject poverty I had an offer of marriage.

PRATT.

And you accepted it?

MARIE.

I did; not to obey the will of my mother, but for the love of her,—to secure for her a more comfortable and peaceful existence.

PRATT.

And you learned to love that man?

MARIE.

I lived up to our contract.

PRATT.

Contract?

MARIE.

I told him beforehand that there was no affinity between us. I did not conceal my past from him. I promised to be faithful, to take care of his interest, and to nurse him when he took sick. I fulfilled my obligation. I did my duty.

PRATT.

He is dead?

MARIE.

He is.

PRATT.

And he was good to you?

MARIE.

He was a man of a strong character, with an inborn sense of duty. He never deceived me, he was a righteous man.

PRATT.

He died a poor man, I expect, leaving you nothing so that you had to work for a livelihood.

MARIE.

He did not leave me a fortune, yet I might have got along by practising strict economy. But when mother died some years after I grew tired of living by myself. I longed for work which, I think, is the only solace for all the sorrows and trials of this life.

PRATT
(with emotion).

You are a remarkable woman, Marie.

MARIE.

Spare your compliments.

PRATT.

I mean what I say, and if there is anything I can do to atone for the guilt of my youth, I will be only too glad to do it.

MARIE.

Is this meant for a proposal?

PRATT.

Not in the usual sense. Let us make a contract?

MARIE.

You mean one that is binding for both parties?

PRATT

(turning around, sees Knox opening the door to the library).

We are coming now, my friend.

MR. KNOX.

Suit yourself.

(Pratt and Marie follow Knox. Ray, Clara and Mrs. Hill enter from the door to the right).

CLARA

(to Ray).

But would not a photograph serve the purpose just as well.

MRS HILL.

I hardly think so; Mr. Artist, give us your opinion.

RAY.

Miss Clara does not seem to understand the problem of a portrait painter. We do not

copy nor do we act as a camera. We have to make a searching study and put our whole soul in our work.

CLARA.

Your soul in the features of your subject.

MRS. HILL.

He said his whole soul, Clara.

RAY.

To penetrate the individuality is our problem, and if we do not succeed—well, our work is simply a failure.

CLARA.

And does your subject sit perfectly still meanwhile?

RAY.

On the contrary.

MRS. HILL.

Would you allow me to talk?

RAY.

Certainly, I always converse with my subjects, I want them to be active and animated, nay, even excited.

CLARA.

Even excited!

RAY.

I study the inner life, the expressions of the eyes, the mouth, the carriage of the head, and all the peculiarities that make a personality; and I try to produce the proper harmony in all the characteristics of my subject. If successful, the portrait is perfect and not a momentary likeness with all that is implied in that word.

MRS. HILL.

I shall be delighted to give you a sitting, if you only think you will succeed in finding the characteristics of my nature.

RAY.

There is no doubt as to that. I am already well prepared.

MRS. HILL.

I have some letters to write. To-morrow I will pack my trunk and return home.

RAY.

You promised to stay till the day after to-morrow.

MRS. HILL.

I did, it is true. But remember, not one day longer.

CLARA

(in the door looking after Mrs. Hill, who has left the room).

Ray, that woman is in love with you.

RAY.

Nonsense, what makes you think so?

CLARA.

And you act as if you were in love with her.

RAY

(laughing).

You are jealous, Clara.

CLARA.

I don't want you to travel with her, or to paint her portrait at her home.

RAY.

But how can I avoid it, it is my business.

CLARA.

You may postpone it.

RAY.

How long?

CLARA.

Until we are married.

RAY.

Married!

CLARA.

Listen. We may expect George here any moment.

RAY.

The man your father wants you to marry?

CLARA.

Yes. He will speak to father and demand a final answer. I will refuse him and confess my love for you.

RAY.

And your father will tell me to leave his house.

CLARA.

Exactly, and we will not see each other for a long time. Why not be married without delay?

RAY.

Without any further ceremony?

CLARA.

I have a premonition, that if we are not married to-day, we will never be married.

RAY.

In the name of God, let us not delay it. But have you really the courage?

CLARA.

Love gives courage.

RAY.

I know, but—how can you manage it?

CLARA.

A few minutes walk from here a justice of the peace has his office.

RAY.

Yes.

CLARA.

You ask him to follow you.

RAY.

To this house?

CLARA.

Yes.

RAY.

But suppose we are detected?

CLARA.

I will see that we are not. I will take the blame on myself.

RAY.

I don't fear the blame, but—

CLARA.

Now or never. I cannot bear the thought of you putting your whole life and soul in studying the color of her eyes, the shape of her mouth, the curve of her neck and the color of her cheeks.

RAY.

But, my dear Clara, it is only professionally. You must have confidence in me.

CLARA.

I have. But I will secure you against temptation. When we are married we can both visit her. You may carry on your work, while I am sitting admiringly by as a spectator.

RAY.

Are you sure you have strength enough to take the consequence of a step that will bring forth the criticism of all whose opinion you hitherto have valued?

CLARA.

I know I shall not be left alone. If my own strength should not suffice, you will help carry the burden of the odium you speak about.

RAY.

I certainly shall not shirk my part.

CLARA.

Then let us take the decisive step.

RAY.

am going.

(Clara sits down with her head resting in her hand. She is awakened from her thoughts by the entrance of George, accompanied by Marie. George is a young man of twenty-three, of a fine appearance, but with a rather sad expression. She rises apparently surprised, and walks toward him with her hand outstretched to welcome).

GEORGE.

Good day, Miss Clara.

CLARA.

Welcome, Mr. Pratt.

GEORGE.

Did I take you by surprise?

CLARA.

I did not expect you just now, though I knew you were coming.

GEORGE.

You look so changed since I saw you a few years ago.

CLARA.

So do you. If your coming had not been announced, I should hardly have recognized you. Your father is here.

GEORGE.

I expected to find him here. I was delayed and missed the first train.

CLARA.

Your father thought so. (to Marie). I suppose father and Mr. Pratt are in the dining room.

MARIE.

They are just sitting down to the table.

CLARA

(to George).

We will go and join them. This way. (to Marie). Please take the gentleman's valise.

(Ray followed by Lovejoy, the Justice of the Peace comes hurriedly into the room. Lovejoy is an elderly man with a clean shaven face. He is dressed in a dark suit, and has a ministerial appearance).

RAY

(looking around).

I suppose she will be here in a second.

LOVEJOY

(producing a marriage license, studies it).

The clerk neglected to write the bride's age.

RAY.

She is of legal age.

LOVEJOY.

She must be, otherwise she could not have obtained the permit.

RAY.

Here she is. (to Clara, who comes from the adjoining room). Now, my dear, is the coast clear?

CLARA.

They are all busy and will be so for the next half hour. Ask him how long it will take.

RAY

(to Lovejoy).

How long will it take to perform the ceremony?

LOVEJOY.

If you are ready now the whole affair will be over in a few minutes.

CLARA.

We are ready.

LOVEJOY.

Please stand near to each other. (Ray and Clara take position in front of him). I see you have had no experience. (to Ray). Please take your place on the right side of the bride. Will you take this woman to be your lawfully wedded wife, to live with her, according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bonds of matrimony, to cherish her, love her and honor her, and forsaking all others hold unto her as long as she lives?

RAY.

I will.

LOVEJOY
(to Clara.)

Will you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband, to live with him, according to the ordinance of God, in the holy bonds of matrimony, to love him, honor, and obey him, and forsaking all others hold unto him as long as he shall live.

CLARA.

I will.

LOVEJOY.

Please join hands. By this joining of hands you take upon yourself the duties, obligations and responsibilities of husband and wife, and forasmuch as you have agreed together in the holy bonds of matrimony, I now by my authority of the law pronounce you husband and wife, (taking Ray's hand). I congratulate you.

(He then takes Clara's hand, and without warning he presses a kiss upon her lips. She hurriedly frees her hand and takes a step backwards. Ray steps in between them).

RAY.

This forms a part of the ceremony?

LOVEJOY

(calmly).

It is one of my prerogatives in conjunction with the performance of the ceremony. An unwritten law.

RAY.

That you always make use of?

LOVEJOY.

It is optional with me.

RAY

(good naturedly).

I suppose it depends upon the age and the looks of the bride.

LOVEJOY.

Exactly.

RAY

(handing him an envelope).

Will you do us a favor now?

LOVEJOY.

I am at your service.

RAY.

Please disappear as soon as possible.

LOVEJOY.

Good-bye, and good luck to both of you.

(Ray follows him to the door; turning around he embraces and kisses Clara).

RAY.

And now, Clara!

CLARA.

Now our troubles commence.

SECOND ACT.

(The scenery same as first act.)

Ray, with pallet and brush in hand putting the finishing touches on Knox's picture. Clara walking nervously up and down.

CLARA.

We have sinned, Ray.

RAY.

Then let us repent, and ask forgiveness.

CLARA.

Father will never forgive us. I have deceived him.

RAY.

Yes he will. It is the duty of all fathers to forgive their children.

CLARA

(stopping in front of Ray).

Is it possible that we are now husband and wife?

RAY

(putting pallet and brush aside produces the certificate of marriage and reads):

This is to certify that Ray Hamilton and Clara Knox were united in the holy bonds of matrimony by me the undersigned, a Justice of the Peace, Augustus Lovejoy.

CLARA

(taking his hand).

Is it not your duty as my husband to carry the tidings to my father?

RAY.

I think, my dear, that you, his daughter, ought to be the first to approach him with the news of the happy event.

CLARA.

You ought to make the first step.

RAY.

Well, I will, but let us wait, at least until I have finished his portrait.

CLARA.

Why wait, Ray?

RAY.

It is rather a delicate affair to ask three-hundred dollars of one's father-in-law. And money I must have, particularly now, as I have to provide for a family.

CLARA.

Gracious, Ray! don't ask money of father, I have some money of my own.

RAY.

Just as you please, my dear little wife. You seem to have lost courage. Why be despondent? After a gray and cloudy morning often follows a clear and bright noon with sunshine for all.

CLARA

(after a pause).

Ray, why did we act so rashly?

RAY.

Would you rather have waited and perhaps have been compelled to marry the man your father intended to foist upon you? Besides, you originated the plan of our immediate marriage.

CLARA.

I am not upbraiding you, I am the guilty party (with a determined toss of her head). I will see father now without delay. I will confess our crime.

RAY.

Crime!

CLARA.

I will tell him that it was I who urged you to do what we did.

RAY.

Thanks.

CLARA.

And on my knees I will ask his forgiveness.

RAY.

And you will get it just as easy as the prodigal son when he returned from his escapades.

CLARA.

But if his wounded pride should prove stronger than his paternal love, if he should turn me out from his house cursing the day I was born, and disown me—

RAY.

Oh, Clara, don't darken the day that ought to be the happiest in our lives with pictures of such sombre colors. I am your husband, I will protect you.

CLARA.

Come, Ray, come, let us make a clean breast of it all. The sooner it is over the better for all parties (opening the door to the library). He is not there.

RAY.

We will find him—soon enough.

CLARA.

I cannot find him too soon—I hear his voice.

RAY.

And I hear the steps of the man he has chosen to be your father-in-law.

(Both step into the room to the right. Knox and Pratt appear from the opposite room).

KNOX.

I understand you, I understand you perfectly well.

PRATT.

And what do you think?

KNOX.

I cannot give any advice in so delicate an affair. Let your conscience dictate to you.

PRATT.

I commence to believe in the laws of retribution.

KNOX.

I always did. Of course, I do not know, nor do I wish to know, about what you call the dark spot of your life. But if you think you have found the means by which to atone for an unjust act, do not hesitate. Have you spoken to her about it?

PRATT.

Not about my final decision.

KNOX.

You ought to, and I will give you a chance. I have a few errands to do. I will send her in here, and you may dispose of the question in the meantime.

PRATT.

I accept your offer.

(Knox leaves to the right, Clara enters from the left).

CLARA.

Is papa here, Mr. Pratt?

PRATT.

No, he just stepped into that room.

CLARA.

I would very much like to see him.

PRATT.

He said he was going out for a walk.

CLARA.

In here you say (pointing to the door to the right).

PRATT.

Yes.

(Clara goes to the right, Ray enters from the left).

RAY.

Is my—is Miss Clara here?

PRATT.

She just stepped in there.

RAY.

Thank you.

PRATT.

By the way, have you seen my son?

RAY.

Yes, he just went to mail a letter.

PRATT.

Thank you.

RAY.

In there, you say

(pointing to the right.)

PRATT

Yes.

RAY.

Then I will find her.

(goes to the right, Marie enters from the left).

MARIE.

You wish to see me, I was told by Mr. Knox.

PRATT.

Come, let us be seated—if convenient.—When I, after more than a score of years, met you here in this house, I recognized you directly. I will candidly tell you, I never quite forgot you.

MARIE.

A bad conscience has a good memory.

PRATT.

You must not be so bitter. I admit that I wronged you, but besides being young I was under the strong influence of a strict father and a loving mother.

MARIE.

Do you not think that your strict father and loving mother would have told you that you were bound by your honor to marry the young and innocent girl, whom you had ruined, if they had only known?

PRATT.

Perhaps they would, though I am not sure, for parents usually take a different view of

such relations. As to myself, I had not the courage to tell them.

MARIE.

And what do you want to see me about now?

PRATT.

It is my wish to make it easy for you—and for myself.

MARIE.

You wish a reconciliation?

PRATT.

I want more than that. I want not only to impress upon your mind that you have awakened my conscience, but I also intend to substantiate my words by acts.

MARIE.

I am not so hardened but that I may forgive you, though, God knows, I have suffered during all these years. As to your last proposition—I need no support.

PRATT.

I wish to make a contract with you.

MARIE.

A contract?

PRATT.

Yes. I am rich, I have only one child, a grown-up son. I will ask you to divide with me, I don't expect you to love me, but if you will move into my house and take care of my household, I will divide with you.

MARIE.

You want me to be your housekeeper?

PRATT.

No, I want you to go through the ceremony that makes husband and wife of us.

MARIE.

You want me to marry you?

PRATT.

I do.

MARIE.

The event of the last hour has unsettled my mind, I am not in a condition to take any decisive step. Ever since we met again my nerves have been in an uproar. Give me time before I answer.

PRATT.

There is no reason why you should hesitate. I will use my best efforts to make life as tolerable for you as possible. By and by I will win your friendship and you will see clearer and clearer that we are all products of circumstances and subject to the changes of law.

MARIE

(with suppressed emotion).

I believe that your intention is honest, but would it not be better for you also to think the matter over before you take any decisive step.

PRATT

(still with her hand in his).

I have no higher ambition now than improving the condition of the life of a woman, whom I once loved but—

KNOX

(suddenly returning).

Well, well, how do you want the cards printed?

PRATT.

We don't want any cards at all.

KNOX.

Only a notice in the paper?

PRATT.

We don't want it mentioned at all.

KNOX.

A secret engagement?

PRATT.

Of a very short duration.

KNOX.

No engagement at all?

PRATT.

An immediate wedding (to Marie). We intend to go home tonight after the necessary formalities are over.

KNOX.

And you and your wife will be traveling. (To Marie.) Remember, you are still in my employ. Please prepare an elegant supper with covers for six (noticing Ray, who just steps in from the door to the right, he calls to Marie, who is leaving), make it seven!

RAY.

That is a lucky number.

KNOX.

Do you believe in lucky numbers?

RAY.

No; all numbers are lucky except back numbers. (To Pratt.) And how do you enjoy your visit to our town?

PRATT.

Very well, indeed, but I will soon have to leave.

RAY.

So soon; but your son will stay a little longer, I expect.

KNOX.

Yes, of course, he will.

PRATT.

I cannot tell; I wonder where he is.

RAY.

I just saw him. He is studying the family album.

KNOX.

All by himself?

RAY.

No. Miss Clara and Mrs. Hill are assisting him.

KNOX
(to Pratt).

Shall I send for a minister?

PRATT.

No, my friend, this time a justice will do.

KNOX.

You want him today?

PRATT.

As soon as he is at leisure. Will you allow me the use of your room on this occasion?

KNOX.

My whole house is at your disposal.

PRATT.

You are very kind.

KNOX.

You say you want him immediately?

PRATT.

If possible.

KNOX.

I will ask Ray to go and get him. (to RAY, who has been reading a paper). Are you acquainted with Lovejoy, the Justice of the Peace?

RAY

(with a frightened expression).

I ought to know him.

KNOX.

You ought to know him! I hope you never paid a fine in his office?

RAY.

Oh no; I have met the gentleman before in a business way.

KNOX.

I will give you a few lines to him, and if he should not be in, just deliver this note. (writing). There is no secret about this matter, still I do not want you to mention it for a few hours.

PRATT.

We want him to perform a ceremony.

RAY.

A ceremony?

KNOX.

Yes, a wedding ceremony.

RAY.

Here, in this house?

KNOX.

Here is the letter, Ray. I have given him the particulars as to names.

RAY
(inquisitively).

And the ages?

KNOX.

They are both of legal age.

PRATT.

That is twenty-one and eighteen.

RAY.

May I ask who is the happy couple?

KNOX.

We will not tell you just now; be gone.

(Clara and George appear just as Ray is leaving; he looks around for a moment, but Clara pretends not to see him).

KNOX

(to Pratt).

Had we not better leave them alone?

PRATT

I think we ought to.

KNOX

(to Clara).

I shall soon be back again. Mr. Pratt has some important business on hand. I have promised him my assistance. We will soon be back.

GEORGE

(looking around).

You cannot escape me now, Miss Clara.

CLARA.

I have not tried to escape you.

GEORGE.

You have avoided my company ever since I stepped over the threshold of this house.

CLARA.

I may perhaps, not have treated you so courteously as I ought to treat a guest in my father's house, but I am nervous and ill at ease.

GEORGE.

Something is resting heavily on your mind.

CLARA.

You seem to be a good observer.

GEORGE.

Let there be a clear understanding as to the relation between us.

CLARA.

I desire this very much myself. But where shall we commence?

GEORGE.

At the beginning. Two years ago when you and your father visited our home, we two were left to ourselves. You remember how we romped around in the woods, prattling and singing as young people only can. I was just twenty and you sixteen.

CLARA.

No, I was seventeen, and a very foolish girl for my age.

GEORGE.

No, you were not foolish but girlish, and I too was boyish. We fell in love with each other.

CLARA.

At least we thought so.

GEORGE.

We did not make any secret of our feelings toward each other. We announced to the world at large that we were deeply in love. In the presence of our parents I pressed a kiss upon your lips, and they en-

joyed the idea of our engagement so well that they gave our pictures to the papers of our town, which gave us a full column of congratulations.

CLARA.

And I felt proud of you, George, and of myself. Never had a young man spoken to me as you did. You approached me in a manner that reminded me of the characters I had met in novels.

GEORGE.

I felt not less proud than you. When I introduced you in my circle of friends and heard the remarks about your noble features my ambition grew stronger and stronger, and nothing but the most empty flattery about you could gratify my boyish vanity.

CLARA.

You remember when we parted, how we promised to love each other to the end of all our days, and your father called me the little princess, who should fall heir to his castle.

GEORGE.

We promised each other in the most solemn manner to keep up a steady correspondence, and we kept our word.

CLARA.

Yes, I wrote twice a week to you and four times a week received a letter in return.

GEORGE.

But after awhile our correspondence grew less voluminous.

CLARA.

I know; I commenced getting tired of letter writing. It seemed to me the contents of your letters grew more and more insignificant. Always the same assurances of your unbounded admiration for my eyes and hair.

GEORGE.

At last I did not know what to write, and I told my father. He dictated to me and I wrote like an automaton.

CLARA.

I had the same experience, but my father told me I had to keep up the correspondence; it was my duty.

GEORGE.

And my father reminded me of the sacred promise to you, and of the fearful consequences of not being faithful to my first love.

CLARA.

But it was no love, George. Am I not right; tell me honestly, am I not right?

GEORGE.

Perhaps not in the proper sense of the term.

CLARA.

It was not love in any sense of the word.

GEORGE.

Most people would call it so.

CLARA.

But it was not, George. There never was any affinity between you and me.

GEORGE.

None of us understood from the beginning what that word implies. If we had not been separated so long, if I had seen you more frequently, the harmony in my thoughts at least might not have been disturbed. Besides, an unmerciful fate stepped in between you and me.

CLARA.

I don't quite understand you, and I have no right to penetrate what seems to be the secret of your life.

GEORGE.

It is not necessary that you should understand me just now. When we two parted the last time we promised to love each other for all time to come. Neither of us intended to break our promises, but we were lacking a clear understanding of responsibility. Now

that we meet again, we find that we have both changed, and that we did not have the courage to say so.

CLARA.

We have both been under the influence of paternal authority.

GEORGE.

Perhaps you more than I. I believe I might have won you if I had only possessed some moral strength. It is now a great consolation to me to know that you did not fasten your future hope to me.

CLARA.

You have grown to be a man. Your candid talk bears witness of your manhood. We will not question each other too inquisitively, but let us form a friendship that will last.

GEORGE.

Be careful about your promises, Clara. Remember that friendship scorns the base accusations of a slanderous world.

CLARA.

I may have to ask your assistance in my own defense.

GEORGE.

I shall never fail to respond. Give me your hand, Clara, and allow me to seal our friendship (Pressing a kiss upon her forehead. Knox appears during the latter part of the conversation in the door to the left, and is about to step back, when Clara discovers him. He moves his hand as if he did not wish to disturb them, and retires. Simultaneously Ray and Lovejoy appear on the scene).

RAY

(to Clara).

Don't be alarmed ; it is only I.

CLARA.

I am not alarmed at all (To George). Allow me to introduce to you Mr. Ray, a friend of our family, an artist of the modern school. (To Ray). Mr. George Pratt, a friend of my girlhood, a son of the gentleman who arrived this morning.

RAY.

I am glad to meet you. Miss Knox has often spoken of you in the most unmistakable terms.

GEORGE.

We were just refreshing our memories with stories from our childhood.

LOVEJOY

(aside to Ray).

A nice kind of refreshment.

RAY

(to George.)

A most enjoyable pastime, indeed, particularly when our memories are sweet and bright.

GEORGE.

And the gentleman there?

RAY.

Oh, I beg your pardon, this gentleman is Mr. Lovejoy, a friend of mine, not exactly from boyhood, but a good friend, nevertheless; a jurist of many years' experience.

LOVEJOY.

My young friend here is a great joker.

GEORGE.

You are practicing in the higher courts.

LOVEJOY.

I don't practice at all.

GEORGE.

I understand, you are retired.

CLARA
(interrupting).

Ought we not go and see our parents.

GEORGE.

As you like.

CLARA
(aside to Ray).

What brings him here?

RAY.

Business, my darling. But what brings this fellow in such close contact with you?

CLARA.

It was nothing but a spontaneous expression of his sincere friendship for me.

RAY.

Perhaps justified by some old, unwritten prerogatives of his.

CLARA.

Don't be alarmed. I will explain all to you later. (To George.) Well, we had better leave now.

GEORGE.

I am ready (offering his arm to Clara, who courteously accepts it, both disappear).

LOVEJOY.

It seems to me I have seen that lady before.

RAY.

Your memory serves you right.

LOVEJOY.

Is she not your wife?

RAY.

You told me so a few hours ago.

LOVEJOY.

Is he the fellow who was your rival before you were married?

RAY.

Don't you think he looks very much like a rival after I am married? There is no doubt as to my being married, is there, judge?

LOVEJOY.

A ceremony has been performed.

RAY.

And that ends it?

LOVEJOY.

Not necessarily.

RAY.

Please explain yourself a little more definitely.

LOVEJOY.

Let me first ask you, where do you live?

RAY.

A few blocks from here.

LOVEJOY.

I will ask you the same question but in another form. Where do you sleep?

RAY.

Where I live.

LOVEJOY.

And where does she live?

RAY.

You mean where she sleeps?

LOVEJOY.

Now you understand me.

RAY.

She sleeps in her room in this house.

LOVEJOY.

That is a rather dangerous predicament that you ought to alter as soon as possible.

RAY.

I don't understand you.

LOVEJOY.

I will explain. There is a paragraph on our statute book setting forth that without dwelling together there is no consummation of a marriage.

RAY.

Oh, what nonsense. I have read about marriage performances by judges of the higher courts between men who were sent to the penitentiary and innocent women.

LOVEJOY.

That is true where both parties are willing to stand by the contract, but where one party is inclined to be contrary, the marriage, so called, is void.

RAY
(laughing).

I thank you, learned Judge, for your valuable information, but in my case you may rest assured that there is no danger.

LOVEJOY.

I hope so; in fact, I feel convinced that there is no danger; still, it is always a

good thing to be posted. But where is Mr. Knox?

RAY

(pointing toward Knox, who enters from his library).

There he is coming.

KNOX.

You are a little earlier than I expected, Judge. The couple, however, will soon be ready. Please step into my library for a little while. (To Ray). And I want to see you for a moment, if you please.

RAY.

I am at your service.

KNOX.

I am going to have a little party here to-night, and I ask you to assist in the preparations.

RAY.

I wish, Mr. Knox, you would give me a few moments for an explanation of my own affairs.

KNOX.

My dear Ray, I have an appointment in a few moments with my daughter who insists upon giving me some information of great importance (with a smile). Do you understand?

RAY.

I commence to understand and of course, your daughter has the preference.

KNOX.

I want you to superintend the arrangements. There is a list of the wine I want for the table. If my choice is not in accordance with good taste or custom you are free to make the necessary change. Please hand my order to my wine merchant. Here is his card.

RAY.

Yes. But——

KNOX.

I also want to make use of your artistic taste regarding the floral decorations for the table, and so on.

RAY.

And as to my own affairs?

KNOX.

I will attend to them as soon as I have finished what I have on hand now. In a few moments we will have a wedding—Mr. Pratt and my housekeeper, Miss Marie.

RAY.

I understand.

KNOX.

I wish you to be present as one of the witnesses.

RAY.

I will.

KNOX.

And when you get time some time to-day I want you to take my portrait—this work of art—and, having carefully wrapped it up, carry it along when you and Mrs. Hill leave.

RAY.

But I may not accompany Mrs. Hill.

KNOX.

You may not?

RAY.

It all depends upon my wife.

KNOX

(with an expression of astonishment).

Your wife! You are married! To the girl you spoke about?

RAY.

To the self-same girl.

KNOX.

I must declare you are a wonderful fellow. Let me congratulate you. Say, Ray, I am longing to have you tell me all the details of the affair.

RAY.

I am anxious to tell you right now.

KNOX.

No, not now, Ray—I must go—Married! I am brimful of secrets. This is a happy house. Love in each corner, and secret, romantic love at that.

MRS. HILL

(enters with a bouquet of flowers in her hand).

I hope I am in time.

KNOX.

Certainly you are. You will be kind enough to assist our friend Ray.

MRS. HILL.

Is he initiated into the secret?

KNOX.

Yes, and he has some secrets of his own. (turning in the door, to Ray.) Bring your wife along to-night, don't fail.

MRS. HILL.

Did I hear right?

RAY.

I cannot deny it.

MRS. HILL.

But why did you make a secret of it?

RAY.

I never intended to.

MRS. HILL.

And may I ask how long have you been married?

RAY.

Not quite a day.

MRS. HILL.

And Mr. Knox knows your wife?

RAY.

Indeed he does.

MRS. HILL.

I wonder if I don't know her?

RAY.

Certainly you do.

MRS. HILL.

Then I shall ask no more questions.

RAY.

You seem to possess the gift of divination.

MRS. HILL.

We women may not be so logical as you men, but we have in return a much keener sight.

RAY.

And you can tell my wife's name?

MRS. HILL.

Clara. Am I right?

RAY.

You are.

MRS. HILL.

But—why—why did Mr. Knox ask the presence of your wife, his own daughter, at

the party to-night, knowing that she is here in the house?

RAY.

He does not know that my wife is his daughter.

MRS. HILL.

Good gracious! Mr. Ray, what do you tell me?

RAY.

The truth, Mrs. Hill.

MRS. HILL
(in an upbraiding tone).

Why did you not tell Mr. Knox?

RAY.

I was urging him to listen to me, just before you appeared, but he would not.

MRS. HILL.

It will be a terrible blow to Mr. Knox.

RAY.

I thank you.

MRS. HILL.

Oh, don't misunderstand me.

RAY.

I understand what you mean. I admit we should have acted somewhat differently, but our union is now an accomplished fact. We are willing to ask forgiveness, but if we do not succeed, we will have to live without it. After all, Mrs. Hill, this is strictly a family affair.

MRS. HILL.

I beg your pardon for interfering. I have certainly sufficient to do in minding my own affairs. It is interest for the welfare of Mr. Knox that makes me forget myself.

RAY.

I believe you, and I am satisfied he is not less interested in your welfare. He just gave me the order to wrap up the portrait and take it to your home.

MRS. HILL

(gladly surprised).

Is it possible? Under the circumstances I suppose I will have to carry it myself.

RAY.

I do not see why.

MRS. HILL.

Will you accompany me?

RAY.

Certainly—and perhaps my wife also.

MRS. HILL.

You shall both be welcome, and I hope it will be agreeable to Mr. Knox, also.

(Knox enters, followed by Pratt in a Prince Albert coat and a white tie, and Marie in a dark dress. Knox opens the door to the library, beckoning Lovejoy to step out).

KNOX

(to Ray).

Was Clara here, just now?

MRS. HILL.

She went out a little while ago with Mr. George.

KNOX.

Well, Judge, allow me to introduce you to my old friend Mr. Pratt and Miss Marie—

LOVEJOY.

I have the name on the license.

KNOX.

That is true. I hope you will execute your work with neatness and despatch, uniting them in the holy bonds of matrimony.

LOVEJOY.

I am glad to meet you all, ladies and gentlemen, and I hope to tie a knot that will never break. (To Pratt and Marie). Please come this way. (The two place themselves in front of Lovejoy, who produces the license from his pocket, unfolds it and hands it to Pratt for inspection).

LOVEJOY.

The names are correctly spelled?

PRATT.

They are.

LOVEJOY
(to Pratt).

Will you take this woman to be your wedded wife, to live with her according to the ordinance of God in the holy bonds of matrimony, to cherish her, love her and honor her, and forsaking all others, hold unto her as long as she shall live?

PRATT.

I will.

LOVEJOY
(to Marie).

Will you take this man to be your lawful husband, to live with him according to the ordinance of God, to love him, honor him, and obey him, and forsaking all others, hold unto him as long as he shall live?

MARIE.

I will——try.

L. of C.

LOVEJOY.

I beg your pardon—

MARIE.

I will try. That is all I will promise.

(KNOX whispers in Lovejoy's ear).

LOVEJOY.

Please join hands. By this joining of hands you take upon yourselves the duties, obligations and responsibilities of husband and wife, and forasmuch as you have agreed together in the holy bonds of matrimony in the presence of these witnesses, I do now, by authority of the law, pronounce you husband and wife.

KNOX

(to Pratt).

Allow me to extend to you on this solemn occasion my honest and cordial congratulations. I never had a more sincere friend than you, and I have none but good wishes for you and your wife. (To Marie) You have

been a most excellent housekeeper, and I do not doubt but that you will make a most excellent wife. May you both be happy and contented, and may no disturbing element darken your days. (Ray and Mrs. Hill join in the general congratulations. Lovejoy folds the license and puts it in his inside pocket with an envelope that Pratt hands him).

RAY.

You have forgotten something, Judge.

LOVEJOY.

What is that?

RAY.

Your prerogative.

LOVEJOY.

I did not forget it. I simply did not make any use of it. You remember, I told you it was optional with me.

RAY.

You are right. It was I who forgot.

LOVEJOY.

Prerogatives should always be used with great discretion.

RAY.

It is true. Circumstances alter many a case.

KNOX.

I hope that you all will accept my invitation to drink to the health of the married couple.

LOVEJOY.

You put that as a motion?

KNOX.

Just as you please.

RAY.

I second the motion.

KNOX.

All in favor of the motion please signify by saying aye.

ALL.

Aye.

KNOX.

Contrary—The ayes have it. (Opening the door to the right.) This way, if you please.

RAY
(to Mrs. Hill).

I wish that invitation was extended to me.

MRS. HILL.

Let us work with the next invitation in view.

CURTAIN.

THIRD ACT.

A large library in Knox's house. The furniture is covered with leather. On the middle of the floor a table with green cloth. Books and papers are scattered in picturesque disorder. A revolving book-case near the table and a large arm chair on each side of it. On the walls pictures of American and foreign authors. To the left a mantle with small statues of famous poets and composers, and a door leading to the sitting room. In the background a folding door, to the right of which is a large window. A student lamp with a green shade is burning. The moon is shining, throwing a mellow light into the room.

PRATT

(to Marie, who is sealing a letter).

To whom are you writing?

MARIE.

I have announced our marriage to a distant relation of mine, the only one left of my family. I wish you would tell your son before we leave this house. I don't like the idea of keeping it secret.

PRATT.

I thought it would be time enough when we get home.

MARIE.

You men have always such queer notions in regard to secrets. I hope that we two shall conceal nothing from each other.

PRATT.

You shall have my confidence in all matters.

MARIE.

I don't want it in all matters — don't promise too much.

PRATT.

I mean in all matters pertaining to our family affairs.

(Enter a messenger boy with a note).

BOY.

Is this where Mr. Pratt lives?

PRATT.

I am Mr. Pratt. What do you want?

BOY.

I have a message for you. Please give me receipt.—Thanks.

PRATT.

(Reading the message, looks at Marie. He is about to put it in his pocket, when he suddenly hesitates and unfolds it).

This is a telegraphic message from our town.

MARIE.

Business, I suppose?

PRATT.

N—o, it is not business. It must be a misunderstanding.

MARIE.

May I read it?

PRATT

(nervously).

Well, yes—certainly—certainly—if you wish so.

MARIE
(reading aloud).

"Dear George: Come home as soon as possible. I cannot be without you any longer. It is dreadful to be alone. Tell the truth. MARY."—Do you know any person by that name?

PRATT.

Do I know any person by that name? I should like to see the man that does not know a Mary. But this message is not for me.

MARIE.

What is your son's name?

PRATT.

Just like mine, only he signs himself George Pratt, Junior.

MARIE.

Oh, in love matters there is no senior or junior. Where is he now?

PRATT.

I expect him here any moment.

MARIE.

I think I will pack our trunks. I have an idea that we will leave this house sooner than we intended.

PRATT.

I think so myself.

(In leaving she meets George, who deposits a valise at the entrance. He looks sad and uneasy and does not seem to notice Marie.)

GEORGE.

Are you alone, father?

PRATT.

Yes, all alone. I just received a message. I suppose it is for you. I opened it—by a mistake. (Handing the message to him.)

GEORGE.

Did you read it?

PRATT.

I did—but I don't understand it.

GEORGE
(reading).

It is plain enough.

PRATT.

The words are plain enough to understand if I only had the key. Who is that girl Mary?

GEORGE.

She is not a girl, father.

PRATT.

So much worse if she is a married woman.

GEORGE.

She is a married woman.

PRATT.

A married woman, sending love messages to a young man visiting a highly respectable

family with the intention of asking the hand of an innocent girl. Don't you think it the highest degree of impropriety?

GEORGE

(with some difficulty).

I will tell you the truth, father. That married woman is—my wife!

PRATT

(who has been seated, jumps up suddenly and walks the floor in great excitement).

Your wife! God Almighty, what a blow! I took you to be an honest man, George. You have been my pride. Your happiness was pretty nearly my only aim in life. Married. You married! Repeat it once more—is it so—and to a woman I never saw? Perhaps unworthy of stepping over the threshold of a decent family. How could you have the heart to strike such a blow, and why did you not tell me? And the innocent Clara, what will she say; and her noble father—what will he think? What a shame what a scandal; what a misfortune!

GEORGE.

You have good reason to blame me. I ought not to have kept my marriage a secret. I confess my weakness. I lacked the courage necessary to tell you. In regard to Miss Clara, she and I agreed upon the most important point—we were never in real love with each other.

PRATT.

Did you tell her you are married?

GEORGE.

No, I did not get a chance—we were surprised by the sudden appearance of Mr. Knox.

PRATT.

And who is the girl you married?

GEORGE.

She comes from a highly respectable family.

PRATT.

Do I know her parents?

GEORGE.

You do not.

PRATT
(suddenly, as if inspired by an idea).

George, there is something you conceal from me.

GEORGE
(hesitating).

What more do you want to know?

PRATT.

The motives for your marriage.

GEORGE.

Is it necessary that there should be other motives besides the usual ones?

PRATT.

In your case there is. You never hitherto concealed anything from your father. You sometimes opened your heart on matters I thought you had better have kept to yourself (with emphasis). You married that girl because you thought your honor was at stake.

GEORGE.

Yes, I thought I was bound by my honor.

PRATT.

You did not at first think of marrying her, but when you discovered the consequences of your intimacy you made up your mind to stand by her.

GEORGE.

We were both responsible. I felt I had to shoulder my share of the responsibility.

PRATT
(in a low voice).

It is nemesis. Slow but sure is its work. It is my own history retold, and yet not half so bad (suddenly). We must leave this house immediately—you, I, and——

GEORGE.

And who?

PRATT.

My wife.

GEORGE.

You married?

PRATT.

Since a few hours.

GEORGE.

To whom?

PRATT.

To Marie.

GEORGE.

Mr. Knox's housekeeper.

PRATT.

My inclination from my early youth.

GEORGE.

There is a romance in this union.

PRATT.

I will tell you when we reach home.

GEORGE.

You did not contemplate marriage until you saw her?

PRATT.

I did not expect to find her here.

GEORGE.

You married in secret, father. You did not think it worth while to let me know.

PRATT.

It was Mr. Knox's scheme to have my marriage announced at the same time we could publicly announce your engagement to Clara.

GEORGE.

I think you are right. We must leave this house as soon as possible. I will try to find Mr. Knox and bid him good-bye. I wonder if he is in here (In opening the door he greets Ray who steps out with an easel and picture carefully wrapped). Is not Mr. Knox in there?

RAY.

No, he is in the other room with Miss Clara and Mrs. Hill.

PRATT
(to George).

There is a fellow, who better than anybody else may prepare Mr. Knox for what is coming. Let Ray assist you—my courage commences to weaken. (To Ray) You will excuse me, Mr. Ray.

RAY.

Certainly.

GEORGE.

What have you got there? (Pointing to the picture which Ray still holds in his hands).

RAY.

A most precious article—a picture of an individual to whom I am greatly indebted and who, on the other hand, is indebted to me. I can not, however, show it to you; you see it is wrapped for a journey.

GEORGE.

I don't want you to, I wish to ask a favor of you.

RAY.

I will be glad to be of service to you.

GEORGE.

I understand you stand high in the estimation of Mr. Knox.

RAY.

He has not told me so. On the contrary, I know he suspects me of being a libertine; not because he has any tangible reason but because I am an artist.

GEORGE.

That is impossible.

RAY.

It is nevertheless so. When I grow warm in my explanation of the nude in art, he accuses me of a tendency to immorality. In his opinion we artists are like so many bees,

sipping honey now from this, now from that flower. But what do you want me to do?

GEORGE.

I just received a message from home, asking me to return without delay. I have to take the train that leaves here in half an hour, and I don't want to disturb him now he is engaged.

RAY.

You received a message from your home?

GEORGE.

Yes; from my wife.

RAY

(dropping the picture on the floor).

You are married—a real married man with a real wife—and perhaps ——

GEORGE.

No, not yet.

RAY.

I must declare this is astonishing news. You kept your marriage secret—am I right?

GEORGE.

You are.

RAY.

But did you not come here to offer your hand to Miss Clara, to whom you were going to be engaged in earnest?

GEORGE.

I did not come with any such intent.

RAY.

What a fool I have been.

GEORGE.

YOU?

RAY.

Oh, I mean I am situated just like you.

GEORGE.

You are married also, and nobody knows anything about it?

RAY.

I hardly know it myself.

GEORGE.

Don't you live with your wife?

RAY.

To tell you the honest truth, I don't. So far, my marriage has been a failure.

GEORGE.

I feel sorry for you.

RAY.

I thank you. I am certainly deserving of your sympathy.

GEORGE.

But to come to my own affair. Will you kindly tell Mr. Knox that a message from my wife made it necessary for me to go home immediately.

RAY.

Does he know you are married?

GEORGE.

No, and unless my father tells him I will ask you to do it.

RAY.

So your father knows?

GEORGE.

Not until half an hour ago.

RAY.

But why don't you see Mr. Knox yourself? It won't take long to break the news.

GEORGE.

I will honestly tell you, I am somewhat of a coward.

RAY.

You have a frail conscience.

GEORGE.

We all have more or less. I think it is a hereditary disease.

RAY.

You mean your father inherited it from his ancestors, and that he handed the legacy to you.

GEORGE.

Exactly.

RAY.

I never thought a bad conscience could be handed down as an heirloom, but it sounds very plausible. I commence to believe that my own family conscience has had some weak spots.

GEORGE
(looking at his watch).

My time is up. Now please inform Mr. Knox of the reason for my sudden departure (handing him his card). When you and your wife have nowhere else to spend a few weeks, come to my home and we will give you a royal welcome.

RAY.

I will accept your invitation, and I thank you also on behalf of my wife. You know, commune naufragium dulce est.

GEORGE.

That is, to suffer in company makes our pangs more endurable.

RAY.

I see you have not forgotten your classics. (Placing the picture on the easel he picks up George's knapsack).

GEORGE.

No, let me carry it myself.

RAY.

By no means. I want to practice a little gallantry; they say a married man is so apt to forget it.

GEORGE.

Well, if you insist.

RAY.

I do, and I wish you to remember me to your wife.

GEORGE.

And I hope you will not forget to bring your wife my best wishes for her future—are you ready.

RAY.

I am.

(He and George leave through the middle door. Knox, greatly excited, enters from the door to the left, followed by Clara).

KNOX.

It is an imposition of the gravest kind. You must not ask me to forgive you.

CLARA

(her arms stretched out towards him).

I know I have done wrong, dear father; I followed the inclination of my heart. You will forgive me, I beseech you. I beg you, father, don't judge me too hard.

KNOX.

Never! Only think of it—you, my only child, to whose happiness in life I have pinned my dearest hope—educated in a rich home—surrounded by everything that tends to produce happiness and morality—engaged to an honorable young man of respectable parents —suffering him to come to your father's home as a suitor sure of your heart and hand —and you, in the meantime, marrying a fel-

low of perhaps questionable character. Did it ever occur to you that such behavior is unworthy of a girl who has been brought up in a clean and unpolluted atmosphere?

CLARA.

You punish me too hard, father. Remember that I told you over and over again that I would not marry a man I did not love.

KNOX.

And to reach the climax, you, a married woman, embrace and kiss this young, estimable man, and allow him to kiss you.

CLARA.

It is a misunderstanding.

KNOX.

Did I not see it with my own eyes?

CLARA.

If you only would allow me to—if you only would listen—

KNOX.

Listen! I need not hear any more—I know too much already—Clara, you cannot stay in this house any longer.

CLARA.

I will leave it, but I beseech you to hear me before I go.

KNOX.

What can you say in your own defense. Accuse me, I suppose.

CLARA.

I believe you are not without blame. A mere child you took me to your friend's home, and you and he made the bargain that George and I should be united for life. Neither he nor I knew what we were doing when we promised to love each other and never part. You never would notice that he and I grew more and more estranged as time went on, we both felt it.

KNOX.

He never told you so.

CLARA.

He did, and I returned his upright admission.

KNOX.

Did you also tell him you were married?

CLARA.

No—I did not tell him that.

KNOX
(excited).

Of course you did not tell him, because you are not honest, but false and untrue, mendacious and full of deceit—what a shame for our family; what a scandal; what glorious food for newspaper notoriety. You are blind, the man of your choice is nothing but an adventurer, an artist, so-called, with a predeliction for the nude in his art; a man without a conscience; a conceited fool who thinks every woman must adore him.

CLARA.

You are excited father, and hardly know what you are saying. I am to blame for our

sudden marriage, not he. The thought of being disposed of in the same manner as merchants dispose of their goods, was repulsive to me.

KNOX
(with feeling).

I wished to see you fortified against the perils of life. I wanted to see you safe and in harbor that I might die in the hope that your life would be a happy one.

CLARA.

You have been a good father but when you undertake to direct my life-scheme you claimed more right than your paternal authority entitles you to.

Entrance of Pratt and Marie, both in traveling costumes. Clara has seated herself; Knox stands with his back turned to her.)

PRATT.

Well, my friend, here we are to bid you good-bye.

KNOX.

I will not ask you to stay any longer. As things have turned out, I think we both need rest.

PRATT.

I never expected such a result. I presume you know it all.

KNOX.

I do—it is sad when children go back on their parents.

PRATT.

I wonder if our children have got the right kind of education.

KNOX.

That is hard to decide now, when it is too late. Anyhow, we have not deserved to be deceived by them.

PRATT.

I agree with you there—I feel the sting of humiliation like you. I am sorry for you, dear friend, sorry for Clara and sorry for George.

MARIE

(to Clara.)

Don't you be sorry, Miss Clara. A man

or a woman should always marry the person he or she loves, if it is possible.

CLARA.

God bless you for those words.

MARIE.

A young woman may, in time, learn to respect her husband, but she cannot be brought to love him. (To Knox.) I bid you good-bye, Mr. Knox. You must try to get over the disappointment. You are not used to the reverses of life, but none or few of us escape them, and least when we have children.

KNOX.

Good-bye, Marie. (To Pratt.) I understand George has left. Tell him that I feel sorry for him but hope that he will find a remedy for the adversities of life.

PRATT.

You are a noble man, Knox. You have learned the great art, to forget and to for-

give. Good-bye, my friend, and good-bye, Miss Clara.

MARIE

(to Clara.)

Remember that you will always find a welcome in our home.

Clara sees Pratt and Marie out, and meets Ray in the doorway smiling and lively. Knox, as if suddenly awakened, walks toward him with uplifted hand.

RAY

(to Clara).

I suppose it is all over. In fact, your father's attitude tells me that he has listened with patience to your confession and has given you his paternal blessing.

KNOX.

You don't seem to have any scruples. Your manner seems to indicate a lightness of heart and mind, as if you had done a noble act.

RAY.

Mr. Knox, I will join my wife and ask your forgiveness I admit we both acted

contrary to what is customary with people of our social standing, but that is all I can do, and if you don't think that is enough I will try to get along without your blessing.

KNOX.

Your haughty manners are very offensive to my taste. No man of honor would act as you did.

CLARA.

Oh, Ray!

RAY.

If you were not the father of my wife I would teach you a lesson you would not forget. Do you think it is honorable for a father to dispose of his daughter's future in the manner you undertook to do it?

KNOX.

It is a father's duty to see that his child does not fall into the hands of a man of dubious character.

RAY.

You are right. But why in the name of justice did you not do it? Why did you try to throw her into the arms of a man whose life is not without blame?

KNOX.

Not a word against George. He is an honorable man, whose whole life has been devoted to love and obedience to his parents.

RAY.

A man may be a highly honorable man even though he be married.

CLARA.

George married! I now understand the secret he alluded to.

KNOX.

It is a base calumniation. I don't believe it.

RAY.

You don't comprehend how the man you

had selected for your daughter could marry anybody else without your consent.

KNOX.

Your sarcastic language ill befits a man who prides himself on being refined.

RAY.

Come, Clara, let us leave this house.

KNOX.

She will not follow you until she has satisfied herself that you told the truth.

RAY.

You have a poor opinion of your daughter.

CLARA.

I believe him, father, and I feel my confidence in him will never be shaken.

KNOX

(to both, who are leaving).

Remember, you made your own choice.

LOVEJOY

(who has entered, looks around to be sure that nobody is listening).

Are you at leisure?

KNOX.

What can I do for you?

LOVEJOY.

Oh, you can do nothing for me. I have come to fulfill a duty toward myself.

KNOX.

I don't understand.

LOVEJOY.

You see, when the young couple, who just left, asked me to keep their marriage a secret, I promised to be silent for twelve hours (looking at his watch). It is now just eight hours since I performed the ceremony.

KNOX.

So you married them?

LOVEJOY.

I had the pleasure, and I feel bound by my honor and conscience to inform you, as a friend of mine, of the accomplished fact.

KNOX.

Don't you think it would have been more in accordance with propriety and good taste, not to speak of friendship, if you had not made such a promise.

LOVEJOY.

Knox, it is one of my peculiarities not to stand in the way of a young couple.

KNOX.

You mean it is your business to marry people, and that business goes before friendship.

LOVEJOY.

You are in an irritated frame of mind, just now, or you would not speak as you do.

I don't marry people for what there is in it. Many a couple never paid me any fees, but it always does my old heart good to see young people happy.

KNOX.

And you don't think it the parents' business to know anything about their children's happiness.

LOVEJOY.

I will not say that. But what can I do. If I refuse my service, some other justice will render it. May I congratulate you now?

KNOX.

I wish you would let me alone.

LOVEJOY.

Well, then I will go. I hope however, that you are impressed with my sincerity. I have kept the promise I made myself, in fact, I still have a few hours to my credit.

KNOX.

Good-bye, Judge.

LOVEJOY.

Only one thing before I leave. Please remember me to the elderly couple I married with your consent.

In leaving, he meets Mrs. Hill, to whom he makes a deep bow. She is dressed in a traveling costume and with a large brimmed hat. She holds a valise in her hand, and stops a few moments at the door unobserved by Knox who is sitting in deep meditation.

MRS. HILL.

Mr. Knox.

KNOX

(discovering her gets up and walks toward her).

Mrs. Hill.

MRS. HILL.

Now, I must be going. Any attempt to keep me longer would be futile.

KNOX.

I shall not make such an attempt now.

MRS. HILL.

You are discouraged, I notice.

KNOX.

What else could I be. My dearest hope has suffered a severe shipwreck. I have lost my daughter.

MRS. HILL.

You only think so. You take too gloomy a view of the situation. The main thing is that she feels happy.

KNOX.

She may feel so just now, but what about the future?

MRS. HILL.

I don't see why the future should not look bright for her. She has an excellent husband.

KNOX.

Do you really mean that?

MRS. HILL.

Indeed, I do. He is young, talented, ambitious—just the right kind of a man for a young girl like your daughter. Mr. KNOX, if I were young I believe I could have fallen in love with him.

KNOX.

I fail to see his attractions.

MRS. HILL.

That is because you are prejudiced.

KNOX

(after a pause).

I see you are ready for the journey. When are you going to leave?

MRS. HILL.

In half an hour we are all going.

KNOX.

We?

MRS. HILL.

Yes, the young couple have accepted my invitation to spend their honeymoon in my house. Would not you like to keep us company?

KNOX.

I—do you really mean that?

MRS. HILL.

Do I mean it? Certainly I do. Why not? I will try my utmost to make you feel at home—and you will have the great pleasure of seeing Ray fastening my features to the canvas, as he expresses it.

KNOX.

Are you still bent upon having your portrait painted—and by him?

MRS. HILL.

Yes, now more than ever. I admire his ability and elegance of execution. You look so astonished, Mr. Knox. You think I am

extravagant; but let me tell you, the portrait is intended for a dear friend of mine.

KNOX.

I remember you told me it was for one of your dearest friends.

MRS. HILL

Yes, if he will accept it.

KNOX.

If he will accept it?

MRS. HILL.

You see, he is a man of rather peculiar notions of what is proper. He is of the old school of thinking. In accordance with his ideas he may not deem it right for a woman to make presents of that nature. (Looking at the easel with the wrapped up portrait.) But where is your picture?

KNOX

(pointing to the easel).

I suppose it is contained in this package.

I gave it in charge of Ray to take it to a friend of mine, if she was willing to accept it.

MRS. HILL.

Why, dear, should she not accept it.

KNOX.

You see she is of the modern school and may not think it worth while to get a present representing such an antiquated fellow like me. Of course, you are not inquisitive, and yet you may feel some interest in knowing whom it is intended for.

MRS. HILL.

I don't deny it.

KNOX.

Well, the lady friend whom I wish to accept the gift in the same spirit as I give it, is—you.

MRS. HILL

(apparently surprised).

Oh, Mr. Knox. You can not imagine how grateful I feel towards you. Perhaps

you now understand why I appreciate Ray as a great artist. May I ask you, when did you make up your mind to make me this glorious present.

KNOX.

You want the truth, I suppose.

MRS. HILL.

Nothing but the truth.

KNOX.

It was from the beginning intended for you.

MRS. HILL
(clapping her hands).

Oh, how charming.

KNOX.

But now allow me one question.

MRS. HILL.

Yes.

KNOX

Who is going to be the fortunate possessor of your picture?

MRS. HILL.

You want the truth.

KNOX.

Nothing else.

MRS. HILL.

Well, when my portrait is finished it will belong to you, if you will accept it.

KNOX

(taking her hand).

Allow me to thank you for your sympathetic attention. You know I appreciate it.

MRS. HILL.

Now, Mr. Knox, be good and join me. I wish you to superintend the execution of my portrait, so that you may have me just as you like.

KNOX.

You want a reconciliation effected in your home?

MRS. HILL.

Yes, a general shaking of hands over the whole line.

KNOX.

And when your picture is finished I shall return to my lonesome house.

MRS. HILL

(fetching Knox's overcoat and hat from a chair in the corner of the room).

You think a good deal of the future.

KNOX.

I don't think more of my own than I do of yours.

MRS. HILL.

Please turn round (helping him to put on his coat). We will not just now arrange for the future.

KNOX.

But we will hope for a happy future for both of us. Am I right?

MRS. HILL.

May I take your arm?

(Knox puts out the lamp; the light of the moon makes everything discernible. Both walk out and the sound of the key turned round is heard).

KNOX

(outside).

Will you please take the key in your possession?

MRS. HILL.

I?

KNOX.

Yes; take it as a symbol.

MRS. HILL.

A symbol of what?

KNOX.

Of our future relation.

CURTAIN.

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